On a Mission

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On a Mission

by barcharonte

Summary

Hannibal has a plan and it involves Abigail, imaginary violin tutors, and mastic. Will also has a plan, and his involves Lily, a tandoor oven, and lots of dogs. It all leads to Beau in tears and the girls screaming. And in the dark of the night, Ripper is on the prowl.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Their home in Paris knew its fair share of division of labour. Some tasks were very clearly Hannibal's, like cooking, and some Will's, like gardening. Each cleaned up after themselves, and the rest, they talked and distributed between each other. Everything was open to negotiation, and it suited them just fine.

Sometimes, however, they took on tasks of their own without consulting the other. Like how, upon returning from the States, Hannibal took it upon himself to shop for those swivel chairs they had loved, and how Will took on whatever had prompted him to ask this:

"Hannibal," he said one morning, finding him in the study perusing the online furniture shops. "This house is yours, right? The plot and all? I mean, you can make changes to, say, the garden if you wanted?"

Hannibal looked at him over the laptop screen. "It is mine to do with as I please," he said, but added tentatively, "Unless it is an eye sore, of course. The neighbourhood has a guideline for renovations and such."

"Could you, uh, pass it to me?" Will said, one hand rubbing his nape.

Hannibal tilted his head to the side. "The booklet should be in the console table drawer in the foyer. With phone numbers to the site management, should the need arise to contact them."

"Thanks," Will said and turned to leave, but Hannibal stopped him.

"Will? Should I be worried?"

"No, no," Will said, inconspicuous. "I was just thinking about building something in the backyard. Let me get back to you on that."

"Alright," Hannibal said. "Before you go, tell me, would you prefer microfiber or leather for the chairs?"

"Uh," Will said, a blush joining his already twitchy demeanour. "Which is the easiest to wipe clean?"

"Both," Hannibal grinned. "What do you take me for?"

"Then it doesn't matter, does it?" Will said. "You know what to look for. No high backs, no mess, and a functional rotation mechanism. You choose."

Hannibal held the eye contact long enough to see Will return his grin, and released him by turning back to his perusal. "I will go with microfiber, then. It shall be less... squeaky."

"Yeah, do that," Will murmured before he disappeared.

*

Over the next week, Will was busy making shopping trips by himself and refusing to let Hannibal help carry his purchases from the car to the house. Hannibal was also banned from the backyard in every way. He could not use the back door, could not go around the front, could not open the curtains overlooking the site, and he absolutely could not get Abigail to tell him either.

“I wish you would enlighten me, Will,” Hannibal said one evening in the foyer. He watched from the open door as Will took out a pair of galoshes from their galosh stand by the front door. The stand had been installed by Will so he could use them when he was gardening, wearing them over his plastic gardening boots so as not to dirty up the house, and so he could wash the boots inside without muddying up the garden. It was a tangible sign that he respected Hannibal’s desire for cleanliness at all times, and it warmed Hannibal to see it in use. “What could be so secretive about something you are building in the garden?”

“I told you,” Will grunted as he straightened up after making sure the boots were sufficiently covered. A long day of labour in the garden had to have been hard on his back, for he was supporting his waist, face streaked with a reddish mud that they did not have in the garden. “It’s a surprise. Please don’t ruin it.”

“And I will not,” Hannibal replied. “But I mourn the loss of the chance to watch you work. You look detectable when you are doing manual work.”

Will threw him a disbelieving look, complete with the raised brows and slight shake of head. “I’m covered in dirt and sweaty and I positively reek,” he said. “You cannot find that attractive.”

“My love, I have seen you covered head to toe in blood and viscera, and you know how that went,” Hannibal shot back. It had been a memorable occasion where Will’s righteous rage and bloodlust had resulted in a rather alluring violent outburst against the leader of an underground dogfighting ring. It had also been a setback for the Harbinger display they had planned, and the body had to be disposed of in its entirety for the amount of DNA evidence on it, but neither of them had complained. Hannibal remembered the incident fondly, frequently, and at random yet often inappropriate moments. He was still not complaining.

“Well, it’s not going to go that way now.” Will deposited his hat on the coat hanger, and sniffed at his shirt. “I’m gonna take a shower, and then another for good measure.”

“And then another, after I’m done with you,” Hannibal said with a smirk, giving Will a once-over. “I might even have to join you for that one.”

“Promises, promises,” Will said with a lingering, teasing look, but gave him a wide berth on his way to the upstairs en-suite.

Hannibal made use of his absence now, and those during the week Will spent in the garden, by carrying out his own surprise. He was, as he had once told Will, a man with a mission. He finished gathering information on the Parisian jewellers and jewellery houses who specialized in *haute joaillerie*, and had already gone to check the third place on his list. His excursions had to both be booked in advance and coincide with Will’s busy moments.

Needless to say, that did not work out smoothly, and Abigail thus became an accomplice to Hannibal's ring hunt.

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The fourth location was proving to be null as well.

"You know he doesn't care for the money or the… bling," Abigail said, and narrowed her eyes with exaggeration to emphasize the point. Hannibal thought the action was warranted, seeing as the ring displays were positively glittering under the bright lighting of the store. It was a miracle anyone got to actually see what they were buying before their limitless credit cards traded hands. Nonetheless, he did not do anything to protect his own eyes, paying attention to keeping them respectfully open.

"He deserves to have the best," he replied simply, glaring at a row of cocktail rings with subtle distaste.

"And you'll get it for him, Hannibal," Abigail said, her lips twitching in the corners with a barely suppressed sneer at the rings. "But the best doesn't have to cost a house or two. In fact, the best for Will is definitely not something that can blind someone simply by existing."

Hannibal turned to her, a brow raised in amusement. "Are you sure about that?"

Abigail rolled her eyes. "Okay, fine, just get him brass knuckles and be done with it then," she said. "All jokes aside, this is not going to work, Hannibal."

"We haven't seen the engagement rings yet," Hannibal said, but deep down he knew she was right. While he did want Will to have the best, he could not envision Will putting on anything this store had to offer without being drugged up *and* tied down first. He sighed. "Let us at least see what they have here."

"Fine, but as of now, *his* surprise is proving to be much more tasteful. And thoughtful." She unfortunately found it pleasurable to tease him with Will's secretive backyard endeavours. And Hannibal, in turn, had since become exceptionally adept at pretending he did not hear her comments.

"What do you suggest we do then?" Hannibal asked, irritated that the jeweller was still entertaining a couple whose appointment had to have ended ten minutes ago. It really wasn't looking good, least of all for the craftsman himself.

"Let's first move on to places that require no appointments, how about that?" Abigail said. Hannibal though about the three other places he had scheduled for the rest of the week, and sighed. He had a headache coming, and he refused to correlate that with the light pollution here.

"It would be most discourteous to leave now," Hannibal said, subtly taking a business card from the counter to put in their rolodex. He did not take kindly to being kept waiting past his time. "Next week," he relented. "We shall start on those then."

*

“How was the guy?” Will asked upon Hannibal’s return from the sixth bespoke jewellery shop. The excuse he and Abigail used to justify their trips together was that Abigail wanted to learn the violin, and that they were visiting tutors to find one she got along with well. It was plausible in that Abigail had mentioned once or twice that she was interested in music. It was also plausible because she had been enamoured with the idea of composing for a loved one, and had listened Hannibal’s harpsichord compositions for Will raptly while Will and Lily sat in the background and got into a silent contest to see who could refrain from eye-rolling the longest.

“He was a proper young man, I suppose,” Hannibal said. He did not like to lie to Will, seeing as their entire relationship had been unanimously based upon honesty after Will’s release from BSHCI and ensuing disappearance. He enjoyed the openness and sense of unity that brought along, but this was one of those things where lies were necessary. This imaginary tutor had to have a good reason to be discarded for their search to continue. “Although I don’t think his interest in her was purely artistic. I’m not sure she appreciated that.”

Will’s attention was quickly drawn to him at that. “Was he out of line?”

“No,” Hannibal said. “Just disappointed that she wasn’t interested.”

Will nodded. “I guess you’ll just have to keep looking, then. In the meanwhile, the garden is finished.”

Hannibal stalled in his endeavour to take out the greens for the salad he was planning to make. “Oh,” he said. Without the distraction of the garden, it could be harder to carry on ring hunting, but Hannibal felt confident that between him and Abigail, they could pull it off. “Is my prohibition over then?”

“Don’t be dramatic,” Will said, leaning his hip against the kitchen island. “But yes. Wanna come see?”

“Of course,” Hannibal said. He followed Will to the end of the hallway that led to the back door.

“Let me first say that I did my research,” Will said, hand lingering over the door handle in uncharacteristic hesitation. “I wanted it to be authentic, so I went and watched a lot of videos. I can now say ‘brick’ and ‘red clay’ in three different languages.”

“Will?” Hannibal kept his face straight. “Do you harbour some belief that I will be critical of something you have laboured over for a week?”

“Well you can be, because I had very little idea what I was doing,” Will replied, “But you have to see it first.” With that, he opened the door and turned on the yard light, before gesturing Hannibal to go first.

At first glance, the garden looked the same as always. Shrubs and young cypress trees lined the lot, and the budding flowers Will planted to make use of the creeping spring lay

underneath them. A small portion was used as an herb and vegetable garden on the far side, while the middle was left grassy and unobstructed for the dogs Will was adamant to get. All in all, the garden was the same as it ever was.

Hannibal turned to Will with raised brows, and found him smirking and pointing at Hannibal's other side.

Beyond the small dining area on the back porch was a round and very big copper basin, upside down on the ground. Hannibal approached it, lifted and put it aside with both hands. Now revealed was a circle of bricks with clay filling in between protruding from the ground and marking a four feet deep pit, the walls of which was layered with clay as well.

"It's not much," Will was saying now, "I mean, it's big enough to take a hunt in one go. The people in those videos said making it bigger would make the cooking time longer and I guess I didn't want to-"

"You built me a tandoor oven," Hannibal said flatly.

"Yes," came just as flat an answer.

Hannibal put the tray back to cover the oven, and stood up, keeping his back to Will. "Because I once said that I wanted one."

"Yes," Will repeated, with more certainty.

"Are you hungry?" Hannibal asked.

"I'm peckish," Will said, a soft smile audible now in his voice. Hannibal finally turned to find him looking fondly at him, heavy lidded eyes gazing at him with affection just the way Hannibal loved to see.

"And at the risk of throwing dinner off schedule, I will put our latest catch here to cook," Hannibal said, calm and collected as usual. "In the meanwhile," he said, and making use of the lull his speech put Will in, he went for Will's legs, catching him off guard and throwing him over his shoulder to carry him inside. "I will devour you instead."

"Put me down, you brute," Will said with a surprised laugh but it lacked any real bite. The real bite was placed by Will on Hannibal's side- through layers of cloth but it was the sentiment that counted- as he was carried up the stairs to their bedroom. Ignoring the attempted maiming upon his person, Hannibal threw Will down on the bed and stood tall by the end of it.

"You have approximately twenty-five minutes to get yourself ready and decide what you want as your *apéritif*, my love." Hannibal smoothed his vest where Will tried to bite him, and turned to leave, his strides carefully kept slow so as not to relay how much he wanted to hurry.

"The firewood is in the shed," Will called out after him. "And the twigs, you need to ignite those first. I know all about it now, Hannibal, I should-"

“Twenty-four!” Hannibal called out from downstairs, which did wonders to stop Will’s insistence to join him. He needed to concentrate and move efficiently if he wanted to make it in time himself. He went about defrosting the striploins and sirloin steaks in the oven and preparing a befitting seasoning mix. Made from grapes growing from the clay soil of Southern France, *Côte-du-Rhône*, he decided, would pair well.

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“This is divine,” Will said, cutting another piece before he was finished with his mouthful. Hannibal had to agree. He also thought that taking dinner to bed once in a while was a great idea, because it had the additional benefit of seeing Will nourished with only a piece of sheet on his lap, thrown there haphazardly. The rumpled hair, the tired but satisfied smile, the delectable sight of his smooth skin, and the mischievous glint in his eyes because they were doing something taboo gave the experience a decadent quality, like this was a lavish ancient Roman feast between illicit lovers.

Hannibal took a sip from his wine. “My compliments to the architect. And the builder,” he said, unwilling and perhaps a little bit unable to manage more than a gravelly murmur. Will smiled at it.

“I’m glad you liked it,” he said.

“How could I not, *mylimasis*?” Hannibal replied, but did not elaborate further. He did not need to. It was touching that Will remembered an offhanded comment from months ago and endeavoured to give him what he wanted, but at the same time, it was their way of living now: Whatever the other wanted he got it, whether he expected to or not. Hannibal had promised long ago in a tiny bathroom, with his nose broken and head split open, to see to all of Will’s needs, and it appeared that Will was likewise committed to the sentiment.

I want to make it clear to us and the rest of the world that you are mine, as I am yours, Hannibal had also said. He was well on his way to accomplish that particular goal as well.

“Abigail and I have another appointment tomorrow with another violinist,” he began. “I’m afraid I will be gone the entire afternoon.”

“That’s okay,” Will said. “I talked to Lily before you arrived, and she said she could take me to the shelter tomorrow. I won’t be home either.”

“So we are expanding the family once again, are we?” Hannibal said, reaching to feed Will from his own fork, the meat so tender it threatened to fall off on the way. Will accepted the morsel with a smirk and nodded.

“She says the shelter policy is very strict, though,” he said when he could. “They demand a few introductory meetings before finalizing the adoption process. You know, to make sure they’d have nice homes.” Will sighed. “It’s not like in Wolf Trap. Strays don’t just wander into my property. And I understand their concern.”

“An admirable measure to weed out the uncertain and the uncouth,” Hannibal agreed. “Though I am sure Lily will vouch for us.”

“She already has,” Will said. “But it’s still going to take a few more visits than I expected.”

“Would they want me to accompany you?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Will raised one brow teasingly. “And I want to keep your suits hair-free for as long as I possibly can. You find Abigail a tutor, and I choose the best dog for us. Deal?”

“Deal,” Hannibal said, leaning to seal it with a peck on the lips. Now that he and Abigail were finished with the scheduled trips to god-awful jewellery shops, and with Will suitably busy once again, they could focus on finding the perfect ring for Will in smaller, less commercial design ateliers. April was fast approaching and they needed to give the jeweller time to work on the chosen design, but all in all, things were going conveniently according to plan.

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“Which one was tomorrow?”

“*Madame Annette’s* and *Atelier Soleil*. You?”

“*Jean-Yves Design*, and then we go to the shelter. We’ll go to *Jacq Blanc* the next day.”

“Oh no, us too! Can you go there tomorrow, and *Jean-Yves* the next?”

“Okay, yeah, I’ll tell Will we should switch, because…”

“Because you read that their designs were much better? From a forum?”

“Sure, why not. Abby, I’m just so worried we’ll mess it up and they’ll-”

“Don’t worry, *ma chérie*. One way or another, we’ll make this work.”

*

Hannibal arrived home before Will the next day. Their two visits today did not yield certain results, but to Abigail’s smug joy, Hannibal admitted that the subdued and humble designs were much more suitable to Will. He was a practical man with no interest in flaunting wealth or status. He was blunt, sometimes endearingly rude, and entirely without pretence- unless he had to be. A ring, if he were to wear Hannibal’s, would be more of a reminder to him of what they had and what they would look forward to, and to others of his firm position in a fulfilling relationship. What it would not be was a statement of opulence and vanity, and Hannibal was gracious in his acceptance that with rings, money was not going to be an indicator of suitability and quality.

Unlike, of course, swivel chairs.

Hannibal was happy that it was him instead of Will who was home to receive them. He directed the porters to the study, the bedroom, and to the kitchen with their respective packages. Once they were tipped and sent off, he got rid of the packaging and went about

cleaning the chairs; a vacuum fallowed by a spray and a scrub with water and rubbing alcohol, and their chairs were ready to go, so to speak. Hannibal gave the one in the kitchen a pleased look and a twirl, and that was how Will found him.

“Three chairs? Really, Hannibal?” he asked with a snort.

“How do you know there’s three?” Hannibal asked.

“I passed by the study and saw one there,” Will said, approaching the chair and giving an appraising touch to its still damp cover. “And there has to be one in the bedroom. With this, it makes three. Unless you got more, of course?” He said it like a question, and Hannibal found the apprehensive expression irresistible. He wrapped his arms around Will’s waist.

“No, darling of mine. I did not get more,” Hannibal said, rubbing his nose along Will’s. He lowered his voice as he nuzzled his way to Will’s hair, mouth close to his ear. “It’s exactly three. I did not want us to be restrained by spatial deterrents.”

“How do you make ‘spatial deterrent’ sound hot? Turn it down a notch, why don’t you?” Will murmured, settling into the embrace. “Did you have any luck with today’s tutor?”

“I would say no,” Hannibal said, glad to have his face hidden in Will’s neck. “She was rather more interested in an advanced tutoring, and did not take on beginner level students.”

“That’s a shame, because I had a lot of luck at the shelter,” Will said.

“Yes, I can smell that,” Hannibal quipped, and stopped Will’s slap to his flank with a swift move, lifting the offending hand to kiss Will’s knuckles.

“Well, better get used to it because I have my eye on three dogs, and a fourth if you keep annoying me.”

“You would *not*,” Hannibal said in mock seriousness, and began to rock them from one side to the other. “Have you no mercy, Will?”

“I don’t,” Will said, but he was already moving his feet to the rhythm Hannibal set, so used to the routine he was that Hannibal doubted he registered the movement. “I have the names ready.”

“And what will you name the slobbery beasts, my love?” Hannibal asked in a murmur, their conversation entirely quiet and tender regardless of the topic.

“Chief for the elderly Akbash with one blind eye,” Will said, swaying in Hannibal’s arms, head on his shoulder. “Spike for the Beagle who was rescued from an abusive home, and Dottie for the Dalmatian who would not let me stop petting her.”

“How about the fourth? The one you would bring home to punish my insolence?” Hannibal asked, his lips brushing the sensitive skin just below Will’s ear.

“You mean the Chesapeake Bay Retriever puppy?” Will asked with a smirk. “Why, Ripper, of course.”

“Of course,” Hannibal repeated with a resigned sigh. He then bit at the earlobe because there was no way Will would give up that opportunity to mess with Hannibal, no matter how well he behaved. It prompted a laugh from Will.

“He bit me too, you know? Nibbled at my hand just like that. You two will get along famously.”

“We are namesakes, after all,” Hannibal said, and stopped their dance, releasing Will with a long suffering shake of his head. “You will need to build them quite a large kennel,” he added.

“Lucky for us, the management does not have regulations for kennels. I can go *wild*,” Will said as he gave the chair a twirl himself. “Huh. This thing is smooth.”

“You are very welcome.”

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“He loved it, and I have to say, it does look pretty good.”

“Did you take a picture?”

“Yeah… This one.”

“Wow, that… I can definitely see it. Did he give the order?”

“He did, but he specifically asked for jade.”

“Huh. Wouldn’t it be funny if Hannibal also chose this?”

“It would… Abby? Don’t. Let him choose on his own.”

“He’s taking forever, and a little nudge wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Abby…”

“Fine. I’m not gonna force it on him, I promise.”

“I guess it would be pretty romantic if they chose the same ring for each other.”

“*Ma chérie,* it would be fucking hilarious.”

“Language!”

*

Jacq Blanc, Hannibal found, was the best jewellery house they visited so far. It was also one of their last options if they wanted to stay reasonably close to home. He doubted he could get away with longer trips, and felt hopeful as he viewed what the showcase before him had to offer.

Jacq, as it turned out, was not short for Jacques but for Jacqueline. A jewellery designer and a goldsmith of forty years, she was the last in a long line of master-apprentice tradition. She was also a stout tall woman with an imposing presence, who had to bend at the waist so as not to hit her head at the low doorframe separating her workroom from the shop.

Abigail allowed Hannibal only the initial greetings before jumping in and asking for her most unembellished designs. The request, abrupt as it may have been, was met with a smile. She removed a tray of rings from the cabinet behind her and placed on top of the showcase before them. While they looked, she proceeded to take out another, and after a short moment of consideration, another one.

“Much better, wouldn’t you say?” Abigail asked, in French so as not to exclude Jacqueline from the conversation. “We have been looking for a very long time, you see?”

“Is it for yourself?” Jacq asked, and when Abigail’s eyes widened at the implication that she and Hannibal were together, she hastened to correct herself. “I apologize; I did not mean to presume.”

“Do not worry,” Hannibal said with a smirk thrown Abigail’s way. “It happened often enough on this adventure of ours. It is for my partner,” he added with pride. “And this is our surrogate daughter.”

“That sounds lovely,” Jacq said, visibly relaxing to hear that she did not offend. “Please let me know if you have any questions,” she added, and stepped back to give them time to peruse.

“What do you think?” Abigail asked pointedly after a few minutes. Hannibal was examining the second tray, paying each ring special attention, eyes narrowed in concentration.

“I’m impressed,” was his quiet reply. “But nothing has stood out as of yet.”

Abigail hummed, and walked around him to check the third tray. A few seconds later, she elbowed Hannibal and pointed at a ring. “How about this?”

Hannibal, suppressing annoyance at being interrupted again, looked at the thing. It was a discreet design with two layers. The outer layer was a few shades darker than the inner layer. There was an undulant, pronged inlay that surrounded the ring, and it was finely adorned with a line of green gems, the stone cuts small and subtle. When Hannibal leaned back to view it from afar, it looked like a green river embedded in dark silver branching out, or antlers wrapping themselves around the ring.

“That is...” Hannibal began, but abruptly addressed Jacq. “May I see this one?”

“Certainly,” she said, and took the ring out from the tray with its individual holder. “Here you go.”

Hannibal took the ring from its holder. He turned it left and right, held it up and down, and ignored Abigail’s snicker at his detailed inspection. “Could you give us some information about this one?”

“That one has two metals, titanium on the outside and white gold on the inside,” Jacq began. She caught Abigail’s Cheshire grin, and returned it before continuing. “The inlay at the front is decked with emeralds, but upon request I can use other precious or semi-precious stones as well.” She hesitated for a second before she added, “I was inspired by one of my grandmother’s rings for the design. She was quite a collector of antique adornments. I’m glad to see it become so popular.”

“Popular?” Hannibal lifted sharp eyes to look at her. She glanced from him to Abigail and back again.

“Both of you liked it, didn’t you?” She replied with a laugh. “That makes it popular in my book!”

Hannibal nodded, attention drawn back to the ring. “May I see which stones you have available for it?” While Jacques went to retrieve her sample tray, Abigail squeezed him in the arm.

“So you liked it, right? This is it, right?” She was practically vibrating with excitement.

“Had I known you were tired of our excursions, Abigail,” he began, an unimpressed expression on his face for the sole purpose of seeing her flustered. “I would not have bothered you with them.”

Unfortunately, she saw right through the attempt. “You know that’s not what I meant. I just liked that one very much.”

“So did I,” he said. When she went for her phone, he closed his fist to hide the ring. “No, Abigail. We discussed this. You will not tell anything about this to anyone. Not even to Lily.”

Abigail made sure to roll her eyes very, very hard. “As if I would do that, come on. I was just going to check my messages.”

Hannibal gave her another warning look, received just as exaggerated an eye-roll from her and left her to her texting to see the stones and discuss possible delivery dates.

*

Omfg he chose it!!

The same one?

YES!!! 🥳

Did you make him? 👀

Why does nobody trust me? ofc not!

The jeweller almost let it slip

That she had the same ring ordered

But I gave her the eyes

Crisis averted 😅

That's wonderful Abby

Should I stop Will from adopting four dogs tho? 👀

That would backfire ma chérie.

He had 7 back in Virginia

4 is a downsize for him

OMG seven?? 😨

He said he had dogs before, but seven???

Yeah he's a weirdo

But a weirdo about to be married 😌

Softie!

HEY!

🤣

*

Hannibal was set to receive the ring two days before the 4th of April when he planned to propose. He was highly satisfied, both with the designer and the design. Jacqueline assured him that the ring could be resized subtly by adding to or taking from the softer white gold inner layer if it was ever needed. She guaranteed a replacement should the stones ever fall, but was almost personally offended at the suggestion that they ever would. Hannibal respected the professional integrity and pride, and only took her business card so he could call and ask about the ring's progression.

The thing itself was also just right. It had a comfortable and sleek design that would not let it catch on random objects and make wearing it a chore. It was practical in that the materials were very durable, easy to clean and hard to scratch or bend out of shape, making it ideal for Will's hobbies and their extracurricular activities both. When it was finished, it would be a subtle and beautiful piece that Will could comfortably wear and never have to take off of his finger. It was perfect.

And thus Hannibal was left with fifteen days to prepare for the day, its evening and their dinner. He had a clear vision of what he wanted down to the arrangement of the centrepiece and the number of courses, and he appreciated Will's distracted state as he built what had to be the biggest dog kennel Hannibal had ever seen in their back garden.

“They are dogs, Will. I’m sure they will appreciate the terrace and the slide, but let me ask you: Is it necessary?”

Will looked up from where he was pounding nails into the wood with a quick hand. “I will remind this to you when I catch you spoiling them with food,” he said with a grin. “Because you’ll spoil them rotten, I just know it.”

“I seem to be inclined to do that,” Hannibal said pointedly as he passed Will a glass of cold lemonade. Will had the audacity to wink at him before gulping it down. Hannibal smiled as he retrieved the glass.

“I must congratulate you about your pace, though,” he said, looking over the garden. In the last few days, Will managed to make his obligatory visits to the shelter every day and install fences around the herb garden to keep the dogs from rummaging through it. On top of those, he was halfway done with the kennel even though it was quite elaborate. “It had taken a week for the tandoor oven.”

“It was the clay,” Will said, avoiding his eyes to give a critical look at the line of nails he hammered. “They were hard to find, and had to be mixed with a specific ratio.” He reached for the sandpaper when the nails passed his test. “The materials for the kennel were easier to find, too.”

“And I’m sure you were motivated by the approaching arrival date,” Hannibal commented. His knee-jerk reaction to Will’s avoidant eyes was suspicion, but he discarded it after a moment of consideration. He had no reason to doubt Will’s words, because, after all, Will had no reason to lie to him. Still, though, he couldn’t help but test the waters. “Would you like me to accompany you to get them tomorrow?”

“That would be wonderful,” Will said, meeting his eyes, the heavy lidded fond look back in his face along with a smile. Hannibal, assured, nodded.

“I cannot wait to meet my namesake,” he said, and succeeded in drawing another bark of laughter from Will, and left him to his construction.

*

Abigail had all her language classes in the morning and her afternoons free this semester, and that was particularly useful for impromptu dates with Lily in between her acting classes, ring hunting with Hannibal, and apparently, adopting dogs. She met them at the shelter parking lot and gave the Bentley an incredulous look.

“Seriously guys, the Bentley?” Bending down a bit, she saw the waterproof draw sheets laid down on the back seat. In a whisper, she said, “I thought you’d get the… other one.”

She was talking about what she had affectionately called their ‘murder truck,’ but knew that it would be rather reckless for them to use it in daylight and risk having it being tracked back to them. Still, it was a wonder Hannibal was not having a twitchy eye or two at the prospect of having four dogs in his world-renowned brand car. He gave her a look and carried on towards the building, while Will gave his arm to her.

“He’s surprisingly fine with it all,” Will whispered back, though he was perfectly aware that Hannibal could hear him. Hell, he could probably hear each individual heartbeat in the vicinity. Will didn’t know what could have caused the guy to develop such sharp senses, but he knew better than to say anything about it. “Wait until you see them, though,” he added, a silly smile taking over his face. “They’re adorable.”

His excitement was contagious, and while Hannibal handled the paperwork, she and Will tried to get the three dogs- and one puppy!- into their individual carrier boxes provided by the shelter. They were ecstatic to leave, and in that they were all over the place, but she and Will managed it somehow through eyes teared up with laughter. By the time Hannibal joined them, they had all four dogs in the Bentley’s wide backseat, snug and secure, with the occasional bark or two. She took her own small Mini Cooper, courtesy of her surrogate parents, to follow them home, and cast herself for the role of the camerawoman as Will took them out one by one, giving each one calming strokes and orders to behave. She was pretty certain the elder dogs understood him, and watched in amazement as tails wagged happily while Chief, Spike and Dottie sat they were told, enjoying their treats with bright eyes.

Ripper- the name making Abigail guffaw when she heard it- was another deal entirely. The moment his box was opened, he darted outside, pissed by the shrubs, and made his unsteady way back to them. Will had literal hearts in his eyes when the pup chose Hannibal to try and climb onto. Hannibal watched impassively as his pant leg was pawed at relentlessly, but before either Will or Abigail could say something, he sighed and gathered the puppy into his arms. Will’s joy was palpable as he kneeled beside Hannibal’s chair to take in the sight, and it made the rest of their pack take heart. The first to disregard the command to sit was Dottie, and she was soon joined by the other two in her endeavour to collect the pats to the head she wanted from Will.

“I hope you are happy,” Hannibal said, looking entirely too stiff with his blank face and the wriggling mess of curly brown hair in his arms. Will looked up at him from his place on the floor, surrounded by dogs, and it was like he thought Hannibal himself had hung the moon and stars.

“Never been happier,” Will said as Chief gave his cheek a lick. Abigail took care to let them have their customary meaningful eye contact before throwing herself beside Will and claiming some of the dogs’ affection for herself. She was careful to keep her phone steady with one hand, still recording.

“Never happier?” She teased, “Not even when I came back from the dead? Shame on you, Will.”

“Oh shut up,” Will said, and in a move uncharacteristic of their dynamic and indicative of his elated state of mind, he wrapped one arm around her shoulder and dragged her into a hug, disrupting her balance and totally messing with her footage.

“Hey, careful,” she said, but besides aiming the camera at Hannibal’s exasperated face and Ripper’s swayed attempts to lick it, she stayed where she was.

“I should have changed before you let them out,” Hannibal said, putting Ripper down and patting him lightly on the rear. He was the one least covered by hair and drool out of all of

them, but still, he added with resignation. “I suppose it is a good thing that I am required to don casual clothes in the house.”

“You can hang this suit with the other one,” Will quipped. His eyes were nearly closed from how narrowed they were in his joy. “To remind you of your sacrifices for this family.”

Hannibal acquiesced with a small nod and a slight twist to his lips. Abigail knew of the “shovel” suit, and snickered as she mentally named this one the “drool” suit. She would keep it to herself, though. The dogs, now having been petted an amount they must have found sufficient, were more interested in exploring the garden with all its new smells and nooks. Abigail eyed the pet gate that would keep them from going to the front of the house, and the fence around the herb garden with approval.

“You’ve really made this place safe and secure for them, Will. When are you going to start the training?”

“Right after we’ve eaten something. I’m starving,” Will replied. Hannibal got up.

“That’s my cue,” he said, looking down at his suit and hands with furrowed brows. “I’ll get to it right after a change of clothes and a thorough wash.”

Abigail made sure to film his retreating back, and captured the moment he looked over his shoulder at the dogs with consideration.

“He’s going to cook for them, isn’t he?” Abigail asked, now focusing the camera on Chief and Dottie sniffing along the shrubs.

“He already has,” Will said. “I gave him my recipe from Wolf Trap, and he made some changes to it for Ripper. Because he’s a baby. Hey, where is he?” He stood up the moment he realized he couldn’t see the dog, looking around. A beat later, he exclaimed, “Abigail, the kennel, get that!”

She turned the phone to the extravagant dog house with its padded, flat roof, four doors, and a slide of all things, and was just in time to record Ripper stumble and roll down the thing, landing in a heap of uncoordinated limbs on the grass.

“Did you get it?” Will asked with a laugh, hands on his waist and happy as he watched over his pack.

“I got it,” she said softly, and smiled. This video was bound to be a favourite of Beau’s, and if she was honest with herself, she was going to keep coming back to it as well. “Uh, Will, you got poop bags, right? I think you should get one now,” she said with a nod towards Dottie, and laughed when it made Will leg it towards the small shed by the side.

*

All in all, the dogs proved to be inclined towards learning and taking orders well. Chief, Spike and Dottie had previously been owned, and although they had to be taken to the shelter at one point, they recognized basic commands. Will could very easily work with that. And

Ripper, bless his puppy soul, was a social dog and just followed in the others' footsteps. This meant he would imitate the others when they sat or ate, and it was a relief.

"He appears to have an extensive reserve of mirror neurons at this stage of his development," Hannibal commented from his side of the bed, reading under the light of the bedside lamp.

"Just what we needed," Will said as he dried his hair with a towel. He was fresh out of the shower upon request and, if he was honest with himself, out of necessity. Training four dogs at the same time was taxing work. He draped that towel and the one around his waist over the back of the swivel chair, and slid in between the covers entirely naked. "An empathetic pup."

Hannibal welcomed him with an arm raised so Will could snuggle up to his chest, and wrapped it around him. "I take it you are pleased?"

"I am," Will sighed, content. He had left them in the kennel, tired and sleepy upon the wealth of throw pillows inside, with their water bowls conveniently placed by their little doors. He had been ready to let them sleep inside if they required it, but it turned out to be unnecessary after all. He was confident, mostly due to his efforts to secure the garden for them, that they would be safe and warm there. He was still determined to have half an ear on the garden in case there were a disturbance. "I really am," he repeated with a murmur, his cheek squashed against Hannibal's chest, breathing already heavier.

Hannibal pressed his lips to Will's forehead, and before he could turn his focus back to his book, Will was fast asleep. "So am I, *mylimasis*," he murmured, and let himself read on 8th century Sufism a bit more.

*

Hannibal told Will of his intention to celebrate the day they met. They did not have many conventional anniversaries, so Will accepted the offer with grace and only a little bit of teasing. Hannibal, of course, did not give away the exact nature of the celebration he had planned, but was pleasantly surprised to find that Will seemed to look forward to the day.

It wasn't like they could commemorate the occasions like Will's institutionalization or acquittal, and it was a few months yet until they could celebrate the date they officially pledged their loyalties to each other in a nondescript patch of grass and underbrush.

The preparations took Hannibal away from home more often than not. Seeing as Will could only be distracted so much by the training and care of their pack, Hannibal had to stoop to the most mundane of excuses to leave. One day he said they needed couscous that they didn't have in the house, and no, he could definitely not change the menu and had to go get it, and no, Will did not need to come. That trip included retrieving the suit he'd chosen for the day from the dry cleaners- the dark smoke-coloured one Will liked with red accents- as well as the purchase of the lemongrass and honey scented candles he had an eye on for some time because Will once said the scent reminded him of the times he baked cakes for Beau in the weekends of his teenage years. And couscous, of course.

Another day saw Hannibal in pressing need of soya oil so he had to leave. That particular trip included a call with Beau, and the exact ingredients he needed for an authentic rendition of

the much cherished crawfish étouffée and beignets from Will's childhood. "*He's mad about you, boy, just stop fussing and pop the question already!*" Beau had said, but upon insistence, been kind enough to fetch the recipes from an overly neglected drawer in his kitchen.

Yesterday, he went out for mastic, and retrieved the ring from Jacqueline.

Meanwhile, Hannibal observed a restless energy in Will. He would give Hannibal a guarded look whenever he found his excuse to leave, and appeared preoccupied when Hannibal tried to engage him in conversation. Hannibal could be reading his own nervousness from Will, or Will could be trying to make sense of Hannibal's increased interest in shopping. Either way, they could be written off as circumstantial.

Except for tonight. It was the 3rd of April, tomorrow was the day, and they were currently having dinner at home with Abigail.

"How's your violin lessons going, Abigail?" Will asked. Abigail froze, her eyes strayed towards Hannibal before meeting Will's.

"I gave it up," she said, going for nonchalance. "String instruments, you know, meh. I could try the piano or the harpsichord or something."

"But," Will said, "You two went to all that trouble to find a tutor. I thought you really wanted it."

"I did, but I couldn't click with anyone, so…"

Will looked at both of them carefully. "It must have been, what, eight tutors you interviewed. Nine? And none of them were fine?"

"We might have been a bit… Picky, some might say," Hannibal interrupted, the picture of humble agreeability. "However, I must say, compatibility with one's tutor is of utmost importance. We would not want her to start only to-"

"Alright," Will interrupted, putting his fork and knife down firmly. "What's going on?"

"Could you elaborate, Will? I don't think I understand-"

"It's a tutor, for god's sake, if you don't like one you move on to the next. It's not that big a deal!"

"Will," Abigail started, but he ignored it.

"And what is it," Will turned to Hannibal, "with all these shopping trips?"

"What do you think could be with them, Will?" Hannibal said, calm as he ever was. Will looked at him, and at Abigail- who, no matter how much she trusted herself, still did not have a passable poker face- and down at his plate. He did not answer. Instead, he picked up his fork and knife again, and continued to eat, his jaw clenched in between mouthfuls and eyes down.

“Was it the dogs?” Will said flatly, disturbing the uneasy silence that settled over the dinner table. “Was four too much?”

Hannibal exchanged a glance with Abigail. On the outside it might have been mistaken as a genial look, but Hannibal could see the “uh-oh” in her eyes, her straight posture and the tense lines of her shoulders. He turned his attention to Will.

“Nothing is too much if it makes you happy, *mylimasis*,” he said, like it was a fact of life. And as far as he was concerned, it was. It did nothing to ease Will’s rigid stance, however. Hannibal could understand how he might have appeared avoidant or absent from Will’s point of view. He could see all to clearly how a nit-picking attitude towards finding a tutor for Abigail and how a sudden inattention to the kitchen supplies might be construed as uncharacteristic and therefore suspicious. He had frankly regarded it a possibility that Will could say something about it all, but hoped that it could wait until after their anniversary dinner. It appeared that it would not.

“Did life here grow stale?” Will was asking now, looking up at him with raised brows. In its indifference, the expression was so reminiscent of Will’s defensive and reserved way back in Baltimore that Hannibal felt a pang of grief. All Will needed was a flannel shirt and a pair of eyeglasses to hide behind, and the picture would be complete. “Is that it? Are you bored?”

“Will,” Hannibal turned to him fully, and tried to convey sincerity. “I assure you there’s nothing more to it than it appears.” Hannibal reached for Will’s hand but he saw it as the mistake it was even as he was moving. Will threw the utensils down and stood up.

“I think I’d rather be somewhere I’m not treated like an idiot,” he said. He did not meet either of their gazes and stormed out of the room. Abigail sat frozen with her wide eyes fixed on Will’s empty chair, and Hannibal took measured breaths.

“I fucked it up, didn’t I?” Abigail asked after a moment, her voice trembling slightly.

“No, you stuck to the script. I think I overdid it with the mastic.”

“Mastic?” Abigail asked. She looked entirely too confused.

“Mastic,” Hannibal replied gravely. He waved off Abigail’s unasked questions and said, “This requires a change of plans, don’t you think?”

“What will you tell him?” Abigail asked. “God, we were so close, too.”

“You know what they say,” Hannibal murmured, and after a sigh, nodded. “There's no way out but through.”

“You mean…?” Abigail looked over her shoulder to make sure Will was not there, and leaned in. “Now?”

Hannibal huffed out a laugh. “He has never failed to amaze me. I suppose it should come as no surprise that he managed to subvert my plans once again.”

“Okay, oh my god, okay,” Abigail muttered under her breath, her distress replaced by excitement in the blink of an eye. “Do you- Should I go?”

“Feel free to stay,” Hannibal said. He stood up and proceeded to put his and Will’s chairs into place. “But I’m going to have to ask you to refrain from gathering photographic evidence until we emerge.” He realized he was stalling when he began to arrange the silverware as well. “Would that be agreeable?”

“Are you kidding me, yes, *go*!” Abigail said, and abandoned her own seat and unfinished meal to look around, presumably to find the best spot and angle to record the video or take the pictures. “I’ll… Wait here, I guess,” she said, and moved to the sitting area further down the room. Hannibal took a deep breath, mentally counted up to twenty, and went to find Will.

Almost as though guided by the hands of fate, Will had gone into the study. Hannibal found him standing before the window, looking out to the garden at the front of their house. He had both hands in his pockets, and was framed perfectly by the window and the surrounding bookcases. The light from the lamps around the room illuminated him as well as the fireplace. Will must have lit it even though the air was mild enough not to need it. *It must be the nerves*, Hannibal thought. *He must have wanted warmth*.

“You were right,” Hannibal started, and let himself into the study, shutting the door behind himself and keeping Will in his sight all the while. He saw that Will did not react to his presence at all. “Abigail had no interest in a tutor, or in learning the violin, for that matter.”

Will stayed still and silent, so Hannibal continued. “And I did not suddenly become incompetent at planning and shopping for meals,” he said, approaching Will but knowing to stop at a certain point. He stopped at the foot of the cloud sofa they both loved to spend time in, which left about three meters between them. From his vantage point, Hannibal could see Will’s profile, his lovely eyes unseeing as they stared outside. He had yet to react to Hannibal, who would have no trouble admitting that he found this unacceptable.

“I was planning something,” he said, leaning against the bookcases on his side of the window. “And it was imperative that you did not find out about it. At first I made use of the time you spent in the garden, with the oven, but once the appointments did not coincide with your busy moments, Abigail graciously agreed to accompany me.”

“What appointments?” Will asked, abruptly turning to him, a deep frown marring his beautiful features. “Are you sick? Hannibal, were you going to the hospital?”

Hannibal’s smile started slow. It grew and grew as he watched Will’s agitation, his worry that Hannibal was not in full health, his indignant anger forgotten in the face of such a possibility. “Not the hospital, my love, no,” he said, eyes tracing the slumping of Will’s shoulders.

“Will you just say it?” Will said, first squeezing his eyes shut and then rubbing them furiously. Hannibal took a few seconds to savour the moment before reaching behind a stack of books in the bookshelf; they were about pre-Socratic western philosophy and, in Hannibal’s opinion, the last books Will would ever want to read. That was why he had hidden the ring box behind them.

“I certainly will,” he said, and walked closer to Will. He was not in Will’s favourite suit, this was not the elaborate dinner he had planned, and these certainly weren’t the ideal conditions to do this, but when Will opened his eyes and found him with one knee on the floor, it felt as if this was exactly how things were supposed to be. He let the sight of Will, speechless in shock and mouth hanging slightly open, calm the foreign feeling of his heart beating fast in his chest and urge him on.

“I had a speech planned,” Hannibal said, lifting the box up. “About the day we met, and how I knew you were the one for me when you said you avoided looking into people’s eyes but held an entire conversation with me looking into mine. Something about how alluring it was to watch you tell Jack off, and how meeting you threw me in at the deep end and turned my life upside down.” He cut himself off. “But I refuse to have you think you are not the centre of my world for one moment more than absolutely necessary,” he said, and opened the box. Will’s wide eyes, unfocused though they appeared, slid down to it.

“Will, my heart, my beloved,” Hannibal said softly, “Will you marry me?”

Will brought up a hand to his mouth and just looked at him, disbelief written all over his face. Hannibal- expecting a *yes*, considering a *no* to be highly unlikely, and willing to wait through a long pause- was openly nonplussed when Will brought his hand down and said, “Wait right there.”

He then proceeded to watch Will go for the bookcase on his side of the window, reach behind his collection of contemporary fantasy books- somewhere Hannibal would only approach on the pain of certain death- and retrieve a very familiar little box. Will came back to him, kneeled before him, and opened the thing.

There they were, both on the floor, holding the variations of the same ring out for each other.

For a solid minute, they stood motionless and just took in each other and the rings.

“Yours is dark green,” Hannibal said at last. He sounded coarse.

“Yeah,” Will said, sounding exactly the same way. “I read somewhere that jade was considered to be the essence of love and protection, and it was used in weaponry because it was tough, and I thought it was fitting,” he rushed through the explanation. “Yours?”

“Amber,” Hannibal replied. “Because I want to preserve every moment with you.”

“And the design?” Will asked.

“Abigail drew my attention to it,” Hannibal said, finally breaking their bemused mood by letting himself smile. “You?”

“I chose it with Lily because I know jack-shit about jewellery,” Will said, and began to laugh. Hannibal, because there really wasn’t anything else left that he’d rather do, leaned forward and kissed him. Will’s arms wrapped around his neck, and his free hand grasped Hannibal’s head as if he was hell-bent on never letting him go. Hannibal held him back and pressed him close.

“I wanted to surprise you,” Hannibal sighed into Will’s shoulder, “and you wanted to surprise me.”

“I was gonna ask you tomorrow, but you kept disappearing and I- it never even occurred to me-”

“That I might do the same?” Hannibal said, chuckling. “However did you find the time to look for the ring? Abigail and I spent days at the high end stores.”

“Oh, you were right. The oven did take a couple of days to build, and the shelter required only half the appointments I said they did.” Will sounded abashed at admitting to having lied to Hannibal, but was emboldened by the smile being pressed into his neck and continued. “I went straight for the less mainstream options. Not because the others were bad or anything but because I was more likely to find something not dripped into glitter, ‘cause, you know…”

“Because you could not imagine me wearing something like that without being drugged up and tied down first. I *do* know.” Hannibal pressed his smile into Will’s neck. “You proved yourself to be wiser than me, my love.”

“Did I? From where I’m standing, it seems like I ruined the surprise because I couldn’t put two and two together.”

Hannibal tightened his hold on Will’s waist, and shuffled closer himself. “Perish the thought. This could not have been more perfect.”

“I haven’t said yes yet,” Will said and turned his head slightly to nudge Hannibal to turn to him as well, rubbing their lips together when he did. “But I guess now I don’t have to.”

“Great minds run in the same channel,” Hannibal said, and answered the pat on his shoulder by pulling Will into a kiss. It got deeper very fast, with tongues battling and lips being bitten, and the only thing that stopped them from taking this to the swivel chair in the room was the boxes each were still holding. Will pushed himself away and grabbed Hannibal’s left hand.

“Vena amoris?” He asked with a chuckle, and upon Hannibal’s whispered “Of course,” he slid the ring on Hannibal’s finger. They both looked down at it reverently for a while, but it was Hannibal’s impatience to do the same to Will that put a stop to that. Will dutifully held out his hand, and when the ring was firmly on his finger, he laughed again, his eyes tracing the same design and differing gemstones.

“I bet you did not even have to size my finger to have this made,” Will said, eyes heavy-lidded and bright.

“I have found that, as with many things, my eyes were sufficient for this task as well,” Hannibal said, bringing Will’s hand to his lips and kissing the ring.

Will grinned, toothy and so wide that it looked painful considering how long he’s been at it. “My task involved a piece of string and various gymnastic moves so you wouldn’t wake up.”

“I would have loved to see that,” Hannibal said, and moved on from Will’s fingers back to his lips.

“I mean, it was impressive.” Will said between kisses. “Especially considering that you sleep with one eye open. I was almost convinced you let me do it, knew about my plans, and still used every flimsy excuse to make yourself scarce for hours every day.”

“I consider myself very lucky, Will,” Hannibal said seriously, “that you’ve given me rest of our lives for me to eliminate each doubt you might have about me and my intentions towards you.” He cupped Will’s cheek, and admired the sight of his ring on his hand before meeting Will’s gaze. “I can only hope it won’t take as long, though.”

“It won’t, Hannibal, just,” Will said. “I don’t know what came over me, honestly. We’ve killed together countless times, for god’s sake. That says lifelong commitment right there!”

“How about our surrogate daughter and our four dogs, and our new lives across the ocean, and our house, and our cult following-”

“Oh, the cult following should have been a wake-up call, I guess,” Will said. “So we’re getting married.”

“Yes, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal said, drawing Will in for another hug and breathing in his scent. “We are.”

“You know what we aren’t getting?” Will asked, muffled by the embrace.

“What?”

“Younger,” Will pushed him at the chest. “Our knees will not thank us if we stay down here. Let me up.”

“One more moment, please,” Hannibal said, and Will stopped struggling. He instead placed his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder and gazed at his ring, letting himself and Hannibal bask in the novel sensation of officially having left no other way to bind themselves to one another.

*

“Are you serious? Right now?”

“Yes, Pops, right now. They are in the study right now proposing to each other!”

“I thought he would do it tomorrow- Wait, to *each other*?”

“Yes, they both wanted to do it tomorrow but Will got suspicious about Hannibal disappearing on him lately and my violin tutors-”

“Girl, what are you on about?”

“Forget it, I’m sure they’ll tell you all about it, but they might come out any minute now. Just stay there, and for the love of God, hold the phone up to your face! Nobody wants to talk at

your chin."

"And you put the phone somewhere so I can see you too. Don't forget you're a part of these moments too, Abby."

"Aww, you-"

"Softie, yeah, I know. You've told me a billion times. Enough already."

"Never."

*

Considering the surprise that was this night, neither Will nor Hannibal did anything more than shake their heads fondly when they entered the living room and were met with Abigail's squeals and her phone balanced upon the centre table, half the screen showing a teary-eyed Beau and the other half a similarly squealing Lily. Abigail threw herself at them and hugged them at the same time.

"Guys, you guys!" She yelled at their ears. "I can't believe it's finally over!"

"Jesus, calm down, will you?" Will said, but the rebuff missed the mark by a mile because he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Let them sit down, Abby!" Lily's voice sounded from the table, and with another hearty squeeze, Abigail stepped back. Still, she couldn't seem to stop herself from dragging Will to the couch before the phone, knowing that Hannibal would follow.

"I have to say," Beau sounded like he was going for gruff but it came out choked instead. Will's heart went out to him. "I was expecting you to pop the question tomorrow, Hannibal. I invited Maddie over and everything!"

Will did a double take, both at Beau's use of Hannibal's given name, and at him apparently knowing about Hannibal's plans beforehand. He turned to find Hannibal grinning at the phone. "You told him too?"

"To be perfectly honest, my love, *he* told *me*."

"What?" Will asked him dumbly.

"Oh no no," Beau was saying, "*He* was already planning it, *I* only gave him some incentive."

"What?" Will repeated, this time to Beau.

"Well I wasn't about to let the two of you share a bed without at least a promise to be wedded, now, was I?"

"*This* was your deal?" Will asked Hannibal, and laughed loudly at the nod he received.

“Show us the rings!” Lily yelled to be heard. She looked like she had been getting ready for an early night, with her blonde hair down and in her pyjamas, before Abigail no doubt had to make the emergency call to her.

“You already know how they look, don’t you, dear Lily,” Hannibal said, but complied and showed it to the camera. “After all, the two of you are to thank for the shared design.”

“Did you guys not like it?” Abigail asked carefully.

“It’s beautiful,” Hannibal replied while at the same time, Will said “I love it.”

“Then yes, that’s all on us.” Abigail said, making Lily giggle and point at her.

“Oh no, this one’s all on you, Abby. I told her not to meddle, so I can’t take any credit for it.”

“I didn’t *meddle*, I just knew Will chose it and asked Hannibal what he thought about it. He chose it himself. When Jacqueline said the ring was so popular all of a sudden, I had a mental freak-out! She almost gave it away. I was like, no no no,” Abigail said, making an imitation of her terrified face and timid shake of her head at the store.

“So that’s what that was about,” Hannibal said. “She handled it quite well, I think.”

“She was such a sweetheart!” Lily agreed. “And she had such good pieces, too. I think I’ll go there again sometime.”

“Oh! Oh, we should make it a date!” Abigail clapped her hands in her excitement.

“Girls, wait for your turn, y’all’re acting like this is about you!” Beau’s voice rose, and it shut them up, albeit with stifled giggles. “When it’s about me! It’s *my* baby getting married!”

“Good for you, dad,” Will said sarcastically, going along with the joke. Hannibal, too, said “My sincerest congratulations to you, Mr. Graham,” but he was completely serious.

“What the hell, son, call me Beau,” came the reply, and this permission to finally absolve the formalities between his dad and his lover- Fiancé? Future husband? Oh god, *future husband*- was what made everything that happened tonight really *real* for Will. Hannibal had been referring to Will’s dad by his name but when addressing him directly, it was always Mr. Graham and- He reached for Hannibal’s hand and squeezed, feeling the ring under his fingers. It was all very overwhelming. “And congratulations to you too, I guess.”

“Thank you, Beau,” Hannibal said with utmost respect, and subtly shifted closer to Will, understanding how he felt and offering him all the support he could shy of throwing him over his shoulder and carrying him upstairs.

“I’m holding you to those tickets,” Beau said, and Hannibal gave one nod to relay that he remembered his promise, and would keep it.

“What tickets?” Abigail asked, while Lily groaned, “How do you all manage to function with all these secrets?” Will agreed, Hannibal and Abigail laughed. As the conversation continued, Will looked down at Hannibal’s hand in his, fingers still intertwined, Hannibal’s silver and

green ring appearing for all the world like it was meant to be there all along, and put his head on Hannibal's shoulder. He sighed the sigh of a happy man, and thanked his lucky stars that, against his better judgment, he allowed Jack Crawford to borrow his imagination.

*

"That was… Something," Will said. They had finished the video call, and moved on to finish their half-eaten meals. Abigail had recorded her phone's screen during the call, and sent the footage to everyone involved while Hannibal fried beignets for them. *I had been planning on serving them tomorrow*, he had said to Will, placing the dessert in front of him and basking in his touched amazement, *but I suppose their time is now*. Will had covered his face with both hands, and stayed that way until he had been sure he would not do something wildly inappropriate with Abigail sitting right across him.

She was gone now.

"It really was something, dear, as you so eloquently put it," Hannibal smirked at him and took of his black henley. Will firmly believed that Hannibal took off his tops before bed especially without care to his hair because he knew it did things to Will to see it so dishevelled. Because it did. Do things to Will. He walked up to Hannibal, toes touching, and raised a hand- his ring glinting under the light of their bedside lamps- and pushed back the hair that had fallen over his forehead, turning the caress into a firm hold when he reached the nape.

"You make me want to do very bad things, Hannibal," he murmured, loving that Hannibal's eyes immediately focused on his lips.

"Could you elaborate, my love?" he said, voice lowered.

"Certainly," Will replied. "I want to use my bare hands to tear my skin. I want to break apart my own ribs, and make a place for you inside me."

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat, but he asked, mesmerised, "Only that?"

"No," Will's gaze slid down to Hannibal's lips. "I also want to burrow into you in exactly the same way. It feels… insulting, somehow. Wrong, that we cannot become one like that."

Hannibal placed his hands over Will's chest as if he was considering doing what Will described. It was so unconsciously done that Will had to smile. "It would be highly inadvisable," Hannibal said. "But there are certainly other ways that can bring us close."

"I was hoping you would say that," Will whispered and leaned in for a kiss, but made use of Hannibal's distraction to push him down onto the bed instead. He stood tall before him, and took his own top off in one swift move. He thanked his past self for convincing Hannibal that wearing elastic waist sweatpants was a perfectly acceptable thing to do, at least while at home, because with another swift move, he had Hannibal only in his boxers on the bed. He looked so delectable that Will actually felt his mouth water.

“Take that off,” he said tersely, nodding at the boxers while he got rid of the rest of his clothes. He watched as Hannibal did as he was told, already eager enough not to stall. They stared at each other. Will knew they were on the same page when Hannibal crawled back on the bed and, with his feet flat on the covers, spread his legs invitingly, displaying himself for Will’s eyes to feast on.

Will licked his lips, and sucked his bottom lip in between his teeth for good measure, still standing at the end of the bed and looking appreciatively at the sight before him. “Perfect,” he murmured. And it was, Hannibal was, everything was. Just. Perfect. “Touch yourself for me, darling,” he said, unaware that the accent he had tried half his life to get rid of had grown more pronounced. Hannibal did notice, though.

“Talk to me, Will,” he breathed. It was a demand as much as it was a plea, and Will knew he was powerless against it. He shivered when Hannibal spat into his own hand, shamelessly capitalizing on Will’s weakness for seeing him acting vulgarly to try his patience. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

“I want you to keep your fingers loose,” Will said, “and your touch light. Slow. I will have you begging to come, Hannibal,” he said, drawling out the name and revelling in the hitch to his *future husband’s* breath. “Make no mistake, I will hear your voice fucking *break*.”

Hannibal followed the directives so beautifully, too, that it was a struggle to remain upright and apart from him. Will managed, but only just. After ignoring his own erection and watching Hannibal stroke himself just so for a minute or two, Will said, “Run your fingertips along the length.” Hannibal trailed his fingers up and down the vein running down his cock obediently.

“Like this?” he asked, and his voice sounded almost unrecognizable it was so deep. Will’s legs twitched with the effort to stay put.

“Yes,” Will hissed. “Rub your palm on the head,” he added, and watched as Hannibal did just that at the end of every upstroke. “Good, that’s so good,” he said, and finally relented to his desire to join Hannibal. He crawled along until he laid beside Hannibal, resting his weight on one elbow and taking care not to touch their bodies other than leaning down to run his tongue along Hannibal’s parted lips.

“Will,” Hannibal breathed against him, his breath hot on Will’s lips.

“Yes, love?” Will asked with an amused tilt to his voice. Hannibal sighed.

“Can I touch you?” came the question.

“What did you have in mind?” Will met Hannibal’s eyes, and saw him struggle to keep his open.

“I want to hold your neck,” Hannibal said, not ceasing his movements, carrying on as Will asked him to. “To pull you close. To kiss you.”

“Not yet,” Will said, winding him up by touching his tongue to his lips and withdrawing before Hannibal could turn it into a kiss. “You can hold yourself tighter, though.”

Hannibal did so, grabbing his length once again, harder than before. “Slow, love. Nice and slow for me,” Will breathed into his ear, watching Hannibal’s hand move. “Now tell me. What did you plan for tomorrow?”

Hannibal’s hand stalled as he huffed out a laugh. He continued, though, when Will bit him in the earlobe for it. “I was going to treat it like it was any other day until the evening,” Hannibal started. “And before dinner, I was going to try to get you to wear the suit that I love on you.”

“You love every suit on me,” Will said, his smile showing teeth. “Which one?”

“The navy blue one,” Hannibal specified, “and I was going to wear your favourite, as well.”

“The red chequered one? With the flowery tie?” Will asked. He didn’t know much about tailoring beyond stitching tears and sewing on buttons, but whatever it was about that fucking suit it made him crazy.

“Yes, that one,” Hannibal said with a smug smile. He knew damn well what he did to Will. Contrary to what their actions right then might suggest, Will was not in full control of the situation. Hannibal was playing him right back.

“And once we were dressed up? What then?” Will prompted. Hannibal licked his lips as he tried to keep his strokes slow and even.

“I was going to serve you your favourite meals. Crawfish étouffée and gumbo, and the beignets for dessert.”

“Appealing to my nostalgic sensibilities, I see,” Will pressed a kiss at Hannibal’s temple. “Did you think I would need to be buttered up, love? That I could ever say no to you?”

“I just wanted everything to be perfect,” Hannibal said. “I had everything planned down to the details of the centrepiece. I have a box of lemongrass scented candles in the basement. Will, let me touch you.”

“Oh no, I’m touching you now.” Will grabbed Hannibal’s wrist and raised it above his head by the headboard. “The other one, too. Up, come on,” he said, and watched with satisfaction as Hannibal placed both his hands above his head. With a murmured, “Keep them there,” he settled between Hannibal’s legs, running his hands up and down his thighs, feeling them tremble slightly with the effort to keep them open for so long. “Now, let’s make this very clear, Hannibal. You will continue to tell me what you planned to do the rest of the evening, and at no point are you stopping. You stop, I stop, understood?”

“Yes,” Hannibal breathed. He watched Will lower himself down without breaking their eye contact, and held his eyes open even when he felt Will’s tongue on his rim. “I was going to make a speech, about how we met, and what-” he lifted his hips to give Will better access, breathing growing heavier with each broad stroke of Will’s tongue over his opening. “What it

meant for me," he said. Will hummed against him, urging him to continue, but the vibrations against himself made the effort counterproductive. Swallowing heavily, Hannibal continued. "What you mean for me. Some analogy about teacups and time. A few quotations from Dante and Homer- *Ah*," Hannibal's voice did break at the sudden stabbing motion of Will's tongue. He strained against the hands holding him apart, but found them unrelenting. "And then I was going to ask you to- To marry me."

Will gave his hole one last stab and lick before leaning back, his lips and glistening in the dim light of their bedroom. "Were you going to get down on one knee?"

"Yes," Hannibal said, pushing his hands under the pillow so he couldn't be tempted to simply reach for Will.

"I never understood why people did that while proposing," Will commented, casual as though he was talking about the weather and not bending Hannibal in half by pushing his legs up against his chest. "But I got it when I saw you before me," he added, like he added one finger after the other, pumping them in and out of Hannibal slowly. "It's a pledge of devotion," he said, watching where his fingers disappeared into Hannibal, just as raptly as Hannibal watched him. "An offer of loyalty." Will reached up with his free hand to take Hannibal into his hand, doing nothing more than hold him tight enough so Hannibal felt his ring against his cock. It drew a moan from both of them, Hannibal moaning because of the intended sensation, and Will from the clenching it prompted around his fingers. "A vow of forever."

"It is," was the breathy reply. "It was, *Will*. Please."

"Please what?" Will asked, although judging by the amount of precome Hannibal was leaking upon himself, he had a pretty good idea.

"Let me feel you inside me," Hannibal said. And oh, it was heavenly to hear those words from those lips, to know that Hannibal needed him just as much as he needed Hannibal. But Will *had* promised to make him beg, so…

Hannibal's hips jerked upwards when Will decided to focus less on preparation and more on making good on his word. He rubbed his fingertips firmly against Hannibal's prostate, his quickening thrusts turning the action into an onslaught. "Don't you feel me inside already, Hannibal?" When Hannibal groaned, Will pressed harder against the nub. "What did you say?"

"I do, I feel you," Hannibal said. His forehead was now covered in sweat, the strands of hair on it wet and darkened, his eyes closing as he lost himself to the sensations.

"One more question, love," Will said, pressing open-mouthed hisses to his thighs in supplication. "Just one, and I'll give you what you want. What did you plan to do after I said yes?"

"This, exactly this," Hannibal moaned, breaking his promise to keep his hands up and away when he reached to hold his own legs open, and Will forgave him instantly. He looked at Hannibal's ring on his thigh and his own ring teasing against Hannibal's rim, and congratulated himself for having lasted this long. Spitting into his hand and giving himself a

thoughtless stroke to spread the saliva and precome, Will pressed the head onto Hannibal's rim. He took care to move very carefully as he pushed in, knowing that while Hannibal was no stranger to this, it was also a fairly infrequent occasion. Once he bottomed out, Will groaned. He had neglected himself for so long in his endeavour to make Hannibal beg and break that this was close to painful for him now. He tried to control his breathing, and was startled out of it when Hannibal touched his chest.

"Come here, Will," he said, and Will obeyed. Hannibal wrapped his legs around Will's hips, and they breathed against each other while they savoured the closeness.

"I love you so much," Will said, all pretence at composure disappearing when he could feel Hannibal's heartbeats against his chest and around his cock. "So much, Hannibal, it fucking *hurts*."

"I know," Hannibal whispered, using his feet to urge Will to move. "I know, my love, I know, I know," he repeated as Will let himself be directed, moving in and out of Hannibal with hard, erratic thrusts. Both of them were past the point of slow and steady, and even civilized, for that matter. Hannibal now had his hands on Will's sides, his nails cutting into the skin there. Will bit at his bottom lip in exchange for it, lapped at and sucked the blood that he managed to draw. He did not see but felt and heard Hannibal come, his body squeezing around him hard and his breathless moan at his ear, and it was this that did it for Will. He started to thrust with abandon, biting Hannibal's chin to hold him still as Will came into him. It was savage and he was beyond caring about it. He did not even slow down until Hannibal cradled him into his arms and flipped them over, smothering him down both with his body and with fucking filthy kisses.

"If I had even an inkling that we would be like this, Will," he said, accent heavy, his body on Will sweaty and heavy and absolutely amazing, "I would have got down on one knee right in front of Jack Crawford."

That startled a laugh out of Will, and it was a feat to be able to laugh while out of breath and so lovingly crushed. "And I would have said yes, because you are you, but also to see his face."

"It is a harrowing thing to realize that you and I never had the chance to mess with him together," Hannibal murmured into the crook of Will's neck.

"Did you just use 'harrowing' in a sentence? And correctly too? Did I do something wrong?" Hannibal raised one hand to ruffle Will's wet hair, and moved a bit to the side so only half his body was on Will's.

"At this moment in our lives, I'm convinced you can't do anything wrong, my beloved, least of all at this," Hannibal emphasized the last part with a bite to his neck.

"Yeah," Will went along with it. "Because I'm flawless."

"Yes, you are."

"And I have impeccable taste in men," Will grinned up at the ceiling.

“If you say so.”

“I can also make better beignets than you.”

“Now you’re pushing it,” Hannibal said, closing his eyes and hiding his smirk by pushing his face between the pillow and Will’s neck.

“Well,” Will sighed with feigned resignation. “At least admit I’m extremely lucky, then.”

“You and me both, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal sighed. He felt sleep creeping closer, so he settled down into a comfortable position.

“Yeah,” Will agreed softly, unable to grasp just how their teasing somehow always ended with confessions of love, and also unable to complain about that.

Too satisfied to turn the lights off or to even wipe themselves clean, they drifted off to a peaceful sleep together.

And they spent the anniversary of their first meeting by celebrating their upcoming marriage in bed. Or, to be more specific, all around the house and upon various furniture including, but not limited to, easy-clean swivel chairs.

Will decided that, as a part of their particular division of labour, Hannibal would handle all things related to furniture from now on.

Hannibal, likewise, left the care of the dogs entirely to Will, with the exception of passing them one or two treats a day when Will’s back was turned.

And no, they were not spoiled rotten, *Will*. They were just robust.

End Notes

I have been gagging for more proposal fics in this fandom and so this is my contribution. I hope you like it!
All store names are made up, but Hannibal grudgingly going through every jewellery store around in search for the best ring for Will is a straight up fact. Undisputable. Indubitable. I'll argue for it until I run out of breath.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!